

# Movie Makers

January-February 2005

Volume 15 No. 1

The American Motion Picture Society

**Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.**

## *Three Minutes to Impact...*

Dave Watterson

**I**n three minutes you can make love or boil an egg ... but can you really judge a movie? That's how long most juries get to assess your movie and make critical notes.

Many European festivals have the jury watching short-listed movies with the audience. Between each one the lights go up for three minutes and then comes the next film. At the end of the day, three minutes after the last credit rolls the jury are on stage discussing the entries and voting awards.

For judges it means adrenalin

and lots of coffee! At least the audience has shared the experience and understands the limitations.

In the three major British festivals judging is done weeks beforehand: the public shows are a celebration of the winners. But each entrant gets written notes from the judges. For judges the process is pretty similar. They will have gathered the previous month for a day or a weekend and watched all the shortlisted entries with a three minute break between each ... The difference is that all their free time in the following week is spent writing notes on what they have seen. As private letters such comments can be a more frank than public discussions. Judges get more

time to choose their words with care. A sensible judge makes a point of acknowledging good things about each work at the start and end of the note, hammocking any negative remarks in the middle.

Whichever system is used judges have little time to assess a movie. Part of their brain must be calculating, scoring and filing away comments while the other part is enjoying the movie as its maker intended. Only a stupid judge writes real notes during a screening – even if you can do so without taking your eyes off the screen, your attention is diverted. Most of us scribble occasional key words to jog memory later.

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## Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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No. 1**

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**George W. Cushman  
Founder,  
1909-1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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Address correspondence to the Society, 30 Kanan Rd. Oak Park, CA 91377-1105. E-mail: [Roger@ampsvideo.com](mailto:Roger@ampsvideo.com)  
[www.ampsvideo.com](http://www.ampsvideo.com)

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UNITED KINGDOM, Lee Prescott, 37, Can-  
berra, Stonehouse Gloucestershire, GL 10  
2PR England

## 2005 Convention!

**W**e have been invited to join AMMA, the Amateur Movie Makers Ass'n, on a cruise to Alaska next year. This cruise would take the place of the usual combined festival of AMPS, AMMA and the Ten Best of the West that is usually held in either September or October.

The cruise will depart from Vancouver B.C. on Sept. 10th and end eight days later, stopping at the ports of Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan and visiting the Hubbard Glacier. All of this will be done in the comfort of the Royal Caribbean's "Radiance of the Sea" cruise ship. The cost varies from \$800US for an inside room to \$900US for an outside room. These rates are very good, due to the advance booking of the rooms.

The 2nd and 7th day of travel will offer those who attend an opportunity to view the winning video entries for the aforementioned contests.

More information will be posted to our web site [\\_www.ampsvideo.com\\_](http://www.ampsvideo.com)  
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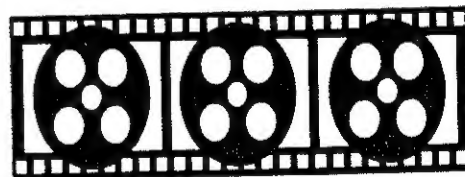
## Planning for the 2006 Convention

We are planning the 2006 Festivals, combined AMPS, AMMA and Ten Best of the West, and propose Las Vegas as the location, how do you feel about this as a venue for us? Comments please to [ned@ampsvideo.com](mailto:ned@ampsvideo.com)

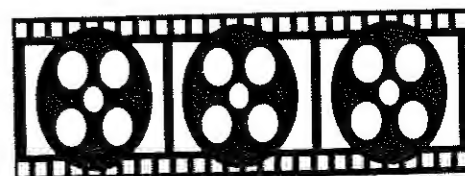
## Tsunami Relief

Please consider contributing to the tsunami victims. If all our members contributed just \$10, it would add up to nearly a thousand dollars.

Contact Roger Garretson at  
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# THE MAKING OF THE FILM "ON SILK"

MICHAEL SLOWE

**W**atching an artist painting a picture might be thought similar to watching grass grow. I was therefore somewhat doubtful of the prospects of success when my artist wife suggested that painting on silk might be a good subject for the type of films that I like to make. She had been very excited by the experience of silk painting which she had recently embarked on at our local art institute where a class was being conducted by a well known silk artist.

I had a look at what the students were doing and was impressed by the visual possibilities that the act of applying paint to silk might offer to the film maker, quite apart from the wonderful pictures that resulted.

I discussed the matter with the artist and he offered to come to our house on the mornings of the weekly class and do his own work there for me to film, provided I then drove him with all his kit round the corner to the Art Institute.

This all started in March 2003 and by June the film was pretty well shot. We have a

large "garden" room at home with lots of big windows which is ideal for a studio and I could be sure of good light which I supplemented with household lights. I had to be sure of doing a careful "white balance" on the camera and even then I did find that my color balance did need to be adjusted in post production.

I was fortunate in that I had complete control over the shoot, unlike in some documentaries when, as a one man band, I find myself struggling to get the material I need.

I shoot DV Cam digital tape on a Sony DSR 300 with the Fuji lens. This is a big heavy camera but very versatile and I like the possibilities afforded by the minimal depth of field at the tele end of the lens. The sound quality is good too with proper XL inputs. The only problem is that I need a big heavy tripod to hold it!

To make the most of the visuals I had to get in really close and try and anticipate the path of the artist's brush since, although he was doing it for the film, I did not want constantly to interrupt him as he was doing a serious piece of work. The action was slow moving so my being very close in had the effect of making it appear faster besides creating a more dramatic effect.

I don't know if the readers of this have seen the film but I

am assuming that they have. I was agonising over whether to limit the film to the main piece the artist was working on or include other work which gave me more scope for illustrating different techniques used as well as extending the visual aspects of the film. I decided to include the other work but some viewers thought that it distorted the structure of the production.

One of my joys in film making is to use music as an integral part of the work and I took the opportunity of constructing some of my most effective "music to visuals" sequences, using mostly some wonderful harp music and floating painted silk scarves down in front of the camera. I also managed to create some dreamlike sequences with silks floating in a swimming pool. I slowed the action in post production and employed long dissolve mixes which give a nice "dreamy" feel to the sequence.

For audio, apart from the music sequences, I used the voice of the artist describing some of his techniques and explaining his artistic aims and thought processes. I showed him some of the material I had shot and sat him down in a quiet place, put two high quality mikes close and left him to talk. He does this well at the best of times so I was not short of material to cut and lay as appropriate.

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So what is that critical part of the mind looking for?

In National and International Festivals you assume that the

craft of moviemaking is almost perfect. It is seldom necessary to suggest "use a tripod". We are looking for a piece of art which moves us or teaches us. We expect every aspect of production to work towards generating the desired effect. Each shot, each angle, each line of dialogue, each cut, each change in ambient sound should contribute to the meaning of the movie.

Good judges may, or may not, be good moviemakers themselves. They should, however, understand how difficult it is to make a decent film especially under amateur conditions. (That is sometimes overlooked by judges who work in film or television.) Such understanding does not alter our assessment of the movie, but it informs our comments. For example if the casting is wrong it counts against the film, but in our comments we accept there probably was a limited choice of actors in your community.

So what should you expect from judges?

You deserve an unbiased but sympathetic viewing of your

work by someone who will tell you the truth – good or bad. You deserve the full concentration of the judge during screening – something a general audience does not always give. You deserve a judge with wide experience of seeing amateur movies who can articulate what works and what fails for them. You deserve someone who will set aside their personal prejudices and accept your movie on its own terms.

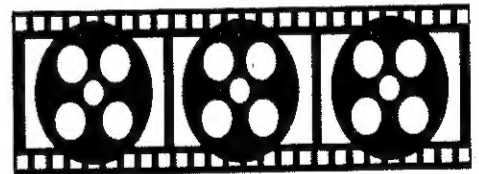
No one likes criticism. As a movie maker you should always try to figure out what a judge means by their comments and consider the points carefully. Do not let yourself be distracted if the judge's words are clumsy or if they get a detail wrong: ("She wasn't wearing a purple dress it was a trouser-suit!") After a few days to let the emotions subside decide where you think the judge was right and where they were wrong.

Oh yes – judges get it wrong! Thinking back over 30 or 40 films seen in one day we can misjudge the balance. We sometimes decide the nature of a movie too quickly. (Is this a comedy or a drama that happens to start light-heartedly?) And in truth there is seldom much difference in quality between the top movies in any festival. Whether X comes 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> is less important than that it gets recognised as being one of the handful of films which is significantly above the rest.

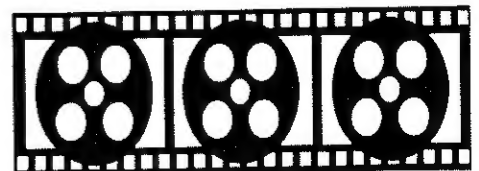
Is there a better way? My own preference is to assess the awards on a single viewing of the movies, which is how audiences see them; then to take copies home on tape so that I can write my notes to the maker after a second or third viewing. That helps me avoid gaffes and allows more detailed comment. It is rarely practical to do so for large competitions, but can be done for smaller ones. As judges we do the best we can. There are lots of things you can do in three minutes. (Try Googling that phrase!) Giving a full and perfect assessment of a movie is not one of them.

- Dave Watterson

Dave has been judging amateur movies at all levels in the UK for 25 years. He has also judged in European Festivals. Oh – and he likes movies!



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# *I do it my way.*

By Ephraim Horowitz

**E**very once in a while I read something that really gets my juices flowing and a recent article in the AMMA monitor by AMPS Ned Cordery "Make Movies - Make Contentious Movies" hit me hard and I would like to expand a bit on it. The wonderful thing about making an amateur movie is the lack of restrictions. We are not beholden to editors or advertisers or required to kowtow to rules set up by political or religious mentors. There is nothing to stop us from expressing our true feelings. So why don't we? I can remember my first ambitious attempt at making a movie, black and white and silent, during the days of the Hays Office grip on censorship. A murderer always had to meet his just desserts and I gloried in the fact that I had the murderer in my "Superdan and the Monster" join our family and live happily ever after. It was pure rebellion and I loved it.

I don't think I was consciously aware that I was using the hobby to blow off steam but in retrospect after looking at the body of the movies I made I realize that is exactly what I was doing. Had I a bit more gumption I might have done what Michael Moore has

done. Whether you agree or not he tells it like he sees it and made himself a fine profit in the doing.

I am proud that I won the AMMA Oscar Horowitz top award by a member five times, more than any other member. I have often wondered why because I have never been much with technology and the competition was fierce. When I look for a reason they were all controversial in a way and expressed a very personal attitude that had to appeal to the judges. "My Favorite Things" was a spoof of what I really hated about NYC, with Julie Andrew's assistance singing about raindrops and roses and whiskers on kittens I showed graffiti, dog feces in the street, kids with boom boxes, people drinking out of brown paper bags, incredible traffic and parking lot prices, porno theaters and on and on. Next, "All about Art" was just a series of pictures showing the kind of art I appreciated and then went to Modern Impressionistic Art, which I have very little use for. I mixed three of my own water colors (I have no experience) with modern impressionistic pieces which brought high prices and challenged my audience to pick out the phonies. Incidentally nobody ever found the three I did and called them for what they were.

"A New Beginning" expressed my objections to the revolu-

tionary change in my neighborhood by shooting an entire travelogue in Flushing NY that looks exactly like it was shot in Hong Kong and not until the very end telling where it was photographed. "Nothing is Forever" showed the beloved Coney Island of my childhood as it looked then and now and how gentrification has eaten it up in the modern world. "The Deceptive Nines" started out to be a movie about so many things I hate in our society, unprotected bumperless cars, huge SUVs, donut tires, euphemisms like the use of "preowned" instead of "used" and the way the number 9 is used in advertising to deceive us. It ended up only about the 9s because there was more than enough there alone. I am convinced it was the subject matter was what won for me, certainly more than my inadequate technology did.

When I traveled with a movie camera I was always on the look out for what really interested me, the microcosms of the worlds we were exploring. Likewise the many movies I made of NYZ zeroed in on foods, the skyline, the neighborhoods, the street events, the city lights, holiday events, attractions rarely seen or known like the Forbes Gallery, the Tenement Museum, the Transit Museum, the scene of the triangle shirtwaist Fire, street entertainers, the Conservatory Garden, the Old merchant's

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# Why Study Silent Films

## Part II

It has been said that in order to view a projected image three things are needed: a light source, a lens and a viewing environment.

Writings as early as 1589, discuss using a magnifying glass and sunlight. Leonardo da Vinci described what is now known as the camera obscura, an idea where a hole is cut into a wall of a dark room and the image of the outside world is projected on a wall upside down.

Development of the projected image has been vastly improved since then. However, the idea of plunking down good money to watch flickering lights on a wall in a dark room with people you wouldn't speak to in daylight remains the same today as it did a hundred years ago. We love our movies. We sympathize with the characters and even idolize them. Film and television are potent attention-getters, in fact so much we see government's throughout the world controlling content.

Films of the silent era show us the path to filmmaking today. The silent era is really the time of the careful shap-

ing of Hollywood as one of the world's centers of film and the development of the Hollywood style of filmmaking.

American filmmaking was really born in the New York City and New Jersey area. Thomas Edison's people develop filmmaking as something to help market the phonograph. The well-known silent director, D.W. Griffith shot his first picture "The Adventures of Dollie" in Connecticut in 1903. Yet ten years later filmmaking shifted coasts. Some suggested that the weather is a factor. A film company could produce all year long in Hollywood. But perhaps it is more for this reason as stated in David Wallace's book "Forgotten Hollywood" regarding Thomas Edison and his "Trust":

*For years, the Trust sued any company that dared to make or import non-Edison cameras and projection equipment, forcing them to flee the New York-New Jersey areas where the film industry was born for distant locations like Florida, Cuba, and eventually California. The Trust's common way of putting the competition out of business was to have hired gunmen shoot holes in their cameras. If they missed the cameras and hit the cameraman...well too bad. It was war.*

The silent era is also known for the development of the Hollywood style. The Hollywood can be defined in a couple of ways. First, Holly-

wood is often looked upon a magical playground where people go to be discovered. Even today when one thinks of glitter and stars and movie making, its Hollywood that comes to mind even though more films per year are produced in India than in Hollywood.

By 1915 movie stars are being groomed. During the silent era the idea of movie stars are being developed in order to increase box office revenues. Actors assume personae's designed for them by publicity departments.

Since silent films had no speaking in them, there was a lot more international distribution of pictures. Simply change the intertitles to the language of the country where the film was being sent and the picture could be understood by the audience.

The silent era also was the time of development of filmmaking as a story telling art and a craft. The earliest films simply captured everyday occurrences, much to the amazement of audiences. However the novelty of "flickers" soon wore off and filmmakers discovered that audiences enjoyed fictional scenarios. By the advent of sound stories, intricate camera usage, and editing had been developed.

By 1922, 40 million Americans went to the Movies. It was a huge industry. In

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Cutting speech is easy on modern editing systems and I could easily construct what I wanted, with of course no fluffs!

Whilst mentioning editing I must pay tribute to my Media 100i (American of course!) which is so similar to the old film editing on which I was brought up, that I was able to make the transition from film to tape so much more easily than I feared. It operates on Macs, is wonderfully versatile, and satisfies the most demanding editors. For multi layering, something I don't need, there is the 844 version and they are shortly introducing a system like mine that will handle the new High Def video alongside Standard Def. on the same timeline as well as converting 4:3 aspect to 16:9 and vice versa with no loss of quality.

Any film maker will know the sensation of sitting amongst an audience watching his own film for the hundredth time and wishing that this and that had been cut or trimmed and I have now learned to print off draft copies of a final cut and project on a big screen as often as time allows to people whose judgement I respect. That way I not only get feed back but gradually hone the finished product as a result of almost getting bored with it. An audience generally gets only one viewing it is true but faults tend to get highlighted by re-

peated viewings.

In this film I was able to combine most of the elements

that I aim for in a production. Firstly I always seek to make an impact with the visuals and this often determines my choice of subject. Secondly I seek opportunities for combining pictures with music in an imaginative style and not merely using the music as "wallpaper". Thirdly I try and probe inside the mind of the person I am featuring and have them express their point of view.

I think that I achieved most of these objectives in On Silk even if the overall structure could have been tighter. The film has been very popular with a wide range of audiences so I must have been on the right track.

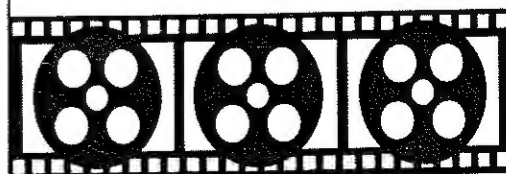
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Home and so on. We know our own neighborhoods; why not show them as only we can?

My enthusiasm for the world around us was contagious and I obviously infected many of my viewers. I truly believe that if you bother to read any person you will find volumes and if you look within yourself for material for your movie efforts you will find a plethora of subjects.

## Winner's Reel Now Available

We now have a selection of the 2004 Festival winners on DVD and VHS tape available for loan to members. The program runs for approximately 90 minutes and comprises: "Home" by Pat and Brian Deakin, Second overall and Best Entry by a new AMPS member; "Ann and Celeste" by Joyce Axelrod, Best by an AMPS member of more than 2 years; "Gerettet" by Oskar Siebert Certificate of Merit; "The First Concert" by Dicie and Ken Sizemore Certificate of Merit; "My Name is George" by James Beach, Best Nature; "Feeding Frenzy" by Mark Levy Certificate of Merit; "Elegia" by Geoff Addis, Second overall; "Love Elusive" by Tyler Holtman First Student; "Fingertips" Second Student and Best Experimental; "Unseen" by Tyler Holtman Third Student. Contact Ned Cordery to arrange a loan of the program, e-mail [goslands@infowest.com](mailto:goslands@infowest.com) or write to Goslands Studio PO BOX 820381, Veyo, UT 84782 or telephone 435 674 2242. After you have viewed the program please return for further circulation.



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1929, the coming of sound was done in response to a slump in the industry. Warner Brothers, at the time a failing movie company, had nothing to lose by investing in sound. However, while embraced by the audience, the coming of sound was not welcomed by much of the filmmaking establishment.

It is interesting to note that Hollywood has always been slow to embrace new technology. When TV becomes a force, movie studios at first don't to sell product to TV or allow their stars to appear on TV. Now TV is an intricate part of the marketing and revenue strategy.

The advent of the VCR was met by a copyright infringement lawsuit by Disney and Universal against SONY. What do you think Disney's largest market is today? Home video. Filmmakers need to study the silent era, it is where American filmmaking really matured.

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American Motion Picture Society  
30 Kanan Road  
Oak Park, California  
91377-1105



Dr. Matt Jenkins-Comm. Dept 06/01/06  
2800 W. Gore Cameron University  
Lawton OK 73515

